

Sermon

Sunday, September 2, 2018

Charleston, SC

8:00 am & 10:30 am Sermon ~ Luke 10:1-20

When the Kingdom Draws Near

The Rev. David Booman

In 1994 a group of poor Chinese house churches undertook an extraordinary mission. They raised funds to send out 70 evangelists into the far reaches of their nation. These evangelists were young, single, some of them only in their teens. They hadn't been to seminary. They didn't have a lot of experience. But they had a passion for Jesus and a vision for bringing Christ to the nation. They were only given funds for a one-way ticket. But they were told that God would provide.

Does this remind you of our gospel passage from Luke 10? Here Jesus sends out 72 of his followers to preach the kingdom and heal the sick. And again, the folks Jesus sends are not professionals. They're not graduates of prestigious seminaries. They're not the cream of the crop of Israel. No, they're ordinary people sent out on an extraordinary mission. They're you. They're me. They're cousin Eddie.

And like those Chinese evangelists, Jesus doesn't send them out with the best resources in the world. They don't have backpacks full of glossy tracts that are relevant, hip, and contemporary. They don't have Hillsong worship music to attract the young. They don't have the latest software to strategically target the best areas for church planting. Instead, Jesus says, 'Don't carry money, food, or sandals. Instead, rely wholly on me. Oh yes, and one other thing - I'm sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves.'

So just to be frank, from a worldly perspective...this sounds like the worst strategic planning ever. Sending out a bunch of nobodies, with little training, no organization, no long-term planning, no resources, into dangerous situations, and relying wholly on the kindness of strangers. It kind of sounds like a mess waiting to happen.

And yet, something astounding takes place. The 72 return with joy and say, 'Lord even the demons are subject to us in your name!' It worked! This crazy mission worked. God's kingdom came. The sick were healed, the demons cast out.

So how do we interpret this unusual passage? What does it mean for us and how we live our lives? I see at least 3 *major* elements in the text that directly inform our own engagement with the world. Prayer, persecution, and power.

So first prayer. I know for me, when I think about evangelism, I can easily get caught up thinking of the *millions* of people who don't know Jesus, and all the work it will take to reach them, and I can feel exhausted before I even start. But when I do this I miss the key to the whole passage, which is that there is a Lord of the harvest and our *first* step is to seek Him in prayer.

At the end of the day, evangelism is not up to us. God is sovereign. *He's* Lord of the harvest. And the *first* thing we should do is not grab a pocketful of tracts and a megaphone, but pray. Asking God to send out the laborers.

There is a priority to prayer. If we don't pray, people won't feel called to evangelize, and those who are called won't be as empowered as they should be. Bishop Lawrence at our diocesan council meeting on Thursday confessed that he's been convicted of a lack intercessory prayer in our diocese. Prayer has not been emphasized enough. And so many of our ministries have languished.

Again, there's a priority to prayer. It's only *after* praying that we get to evangelism. And when we finally do hit the road what's the first thing we should expect? Jesus says 'I'm sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves.'

According to Jesus, we should expect rejection. We should expect persecution. We should expect that our

Transforming Hearts Through Jesus Christ

peace will not always be received. Now, this may not sound like a very good *sell* on Jesus' part—not really an uplifting invitation—and yet, I believe there's tremendous relief simply in knowing what we're going to be in for.

We don't have to anxiously wonder, what if someone rejects me? What if someone is rude? What if a friend thinks I've gotten too personal, talking about Jesus? The truth is it's not a matter of *if* we'll be rejected—it's a matter of *when*. And the amazing thing is that it's OK. We're not failures if we're rejected. Jesus has already told us that's part of the game plan, and it's still worth it. As the apostle James writes, 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds.'

OK, so we should begin with prayer, we can expect persecution. What else does Jesus say about evangelism? He says there will be power! Evangelism is not simply *preaching* the gospel. It's also *demonstrating* the gospel. Verse 8: *Whenever you enter a town, heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*

Yes, my friends, these are Jesus' marching orders time and time again. Preach the kingdom and heal the sick. Because the kingdom of God is not an intellectual exercise. It's not theoretical. It's not a belief system. Rather, it's a tangible encounter with the living God. It's an experience of God's will *actually being done* on earth, as it is in heaven.

Now here at St. Michael's we believe that Jesus still heals today. That He's the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. And the same power which raised Him from the dead now dwells in us, His people.

And yet, at the same time we're Anglicans. Which means we like things done properly. In a dignified manner. We don't like hoopla or drama (unless it's

liturgical). And so unfortunately we don't always *celebrate* those moments when God's kingdom comes, simply because it's *different*.

But I'm here to tell you St. Michael's, our church is FULL of people who have experienced the miraculous kingdom of God. They're all around you. So don't ask me, ask them.

David Richardson was once experiencing significant TMJ headaches for months. Seeing a specialist. He got prayer one Wednesday night, and actually felt his jaw pop back into place and all the pain went away.

Helen Geer, suffering severe depression for months. Seeing a psychiatrist, etc. Came to a DOHP. Had her depression leave instantaneously and it hasn't come back.

Kevin Kalman, facing rotator cuff surgery and knowing he couldn't take painkillers because of past addiction issues. We prayed there wouldn't be pain. And after the surgery he didn't need anything for the pain. *Anything!*

Ginny Good had a very painful hip replacement, and afterwards her doctor told her she also needed a knee replacement. The cartilage was gone. Ginny knew she couldn't endure another surgery so she prayed for healing. What do you know, at the next appointment they found *new cartilage in her knee*. You hear that? New cartilage in her knee.

Truman Kemp – experiencing daily headaches for months, seeing a neurologist. He got a quick prayer one day out in the churchyard. Boom, the pain left and hasn't returned.

My friends, I could go on all morning long.

But finally, beyond the walls of St. Michael's...two years ago we sent a team to India. And under a tent the team prayed for a pastor who was blind. The next day the pastor returned and he could see. Bishop Dutta tells us that after that pastor returned to his village, 1,000 people were baptized. Because they could see the undeniable evidence of the kingdom of God.

My friends Jesus is alive and well. He's still in the business of healing. And just as He sent out 72 ordinary people to be evangelists, He calls ALL of us to join in the ministry of healing. Young and old, rich and poor.

This Wednesday night we'll begin an 11-week healing prayer class. And I want to emphasize, it's for *everyone!* I don't care about your experience, your

faith or lack of faith. I don't care what you know or don't know. My only question is: Can you say, 'Be Healed in Jesus' name? If you can say those five words, you're qualified for our class.

You see God delights to use ordinary people for extraordinary purposes. If you don't believe me, look at the end of our passage... where we see the greatest joy Jesus ever expressed in the gospels.

Verse 21: '*In that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."*

Jesus rejoices that God reveals precious things to humble, and ordinary people. The word here for 'rejoice' is extremely rare in the NT, showing up less than a dozen times. It means *exult with exceeding joy*, it means *exuberant ecstasy*. And this is what Jesus feels when God uses humble people.

Yes, God delights to use ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things.

Remember those 70 Chinese Evangelists who went out with one-way tickets? Well six months later they all returned and had a reunion, and this is a report from someone at that gathering: 'When we heard their testimony everyone was crying. They wore out their shoes, they were rejected by people. They lived in ditches and forests. Some of them lived with pigs....[yet] we were joyful because they all came back alive.'

My friends, in 6 months those 70 young evangelists planted churches in 22 different provinces in China. And today, only 24 years later, those churches have hundreds of thousands of members. Because God loves to use ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

To close, there's one final thing I'd like to point out, and it has to do with the context of evangelism. Because Jesus does not send out the 72 at some random moment in his ministry. Luke chapter 10 is not simply as good a time as any. But rather, Jesus sends them with *strategic timing*.

You see, the sending of the 72 actually takes place at the *fulcrum* of the gospel of Luke. The place where everything changes. Look with me at the very end of chapter 9. In verse 51, we read these words, '*When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to*

Jerusalem.' And *then* Jesus sends out the 72.

Yes, the wonders of evangelism, as amazing as they are, do not unfold amid brazen triumphalism, but rather, in the shadow of the cross. It's when Jesus begins his last journey—to Jerusalem and his death—that he sends out his followers. It's at the precise moment when the cross begins to loom over the horizon, that true evangelism begins.

Why is this? Why is the cross necessary for evangelism? Because Jesus knows that evangelism cannot be done by those focused on power and signs and wonders. Real evangelism can only be motivated by love – the kind of love which lays down its life for a friend.

And that is why Jesus says at the end of today's passage, 'Yes, I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning, and you'll have power and authority over demons and serpents. But do not rejoice in the power you wield and the wonders you do. Rejoice in who you are. Rejoice that you are mine. That you are loved by God. That you've been bought with a price. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

And so my friends, today may we also share in the joy of Jesus. May we also rejoice. Not in our own powers and abilities, not in the rich history of our church, not even in the evangelism we have done or will do. But may we rejoice that our names are written in heaven, and not with golden pens and heavenly ink. But with the jagged nails of Calvary, and the righteous blood of Jesus.

To Him be the glory. Now and forever. Amen.